

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Theater People from Ohio

Personal Experience

O. H. 926

THOMAS A. SCHROTH

Interviewed

by

Carol S. Mills

on

January 10, 1982

THOMAS A. SCHROTH

Tom Schroth is an architect who has kept his home base in Niles, Ohio for his entire life, which began on March 9, 1922. He resides at the site of his family's homestead, 20 Neil Street, which he has enhanced throughout with his architectural talents into a home of grace and beauty which is a fitting setting for such an elegant 20th century gentleman. Tom brought his love of architecture to work at the Trumbull New Theatre in Warren, Ohio and blended it successfully with his love of theatre. He is the architect responsible for the unique building situated on Route 422 just west of Route 46 in Warren, Ohio.

Tom says he would never leave Niles, Ohio, what he terms a "bedroom community." Niles is a place where he can quietly go about his work, without outside interruption, while still travelling all over the globe in his line of work, as well as in pursuit of his many cultural interests. He has long been an active performer at the Trumbull New Theater, as well as its designer and "master builder." He is also heavily involved in the Warren Chamber Orchestra. The walls of his home are graced with great works of artist such as Braque, Chagall, Toulouse-Lautrec and Picasso. He also is a seasoned traveler, citing Florence, Italy as his ideal city. He is interested in the study and practice of

other languages, notably Italian and French, and on top of all these renaissance-man accomplishments, is a superb gourmet chef.

For all the impressive accomplishments listed, he is still as warm and down-to-earth as any good country gentleman should be. He states that he is a content man, and this is indeed evident in his every gesture and remark. One comes away from his presence refreshed and delighted, inspired by the loveliness of life.

He says that one of his grandest memories is being able to spend time with his grandfather in the same house as he grew up in. He expressed the wish that more people could bask in the company of their older relatives as he was able to do when he was growing up.

There has been a foundation established for choral music in the name of his mother, Elizabeth Evans Schroth. In the early summer of 1982, Mr. Schroth has arranged with the Men's Chorus of Dowlais, Wales to come to Niles to perform under the patronage of this foundation. Mr. Schroth's mother was Welsh, so this lovely tribute can well be understood as having special significance.

Tom Schroth will perform in T.N.T.'s 25th Anniversary of their building in March, in the great American Play, "The Death of a Salesman," by Arthur Miller. He will play the lead role of Willy Loman. This should prove to be an evening of double triumph for this engaging and creative man. Besides lovely buildings, he has built a truly marvelous life.

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS A. SCHROTH

INTERVIEWER: Carol S. Mills

SUBJECT: architecture, travel, theater, Niles, Ohio

DATE: January 10, 1982

M: This is an interview with Tom Schroth for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Theater People from Ohio, by Carol Schaffer Mills, at 20 Neil Street, Niles, Ohio, on January 10, 1982.

Say anything you want. Start with your background.

S: I live in Niles, and I do residential architecture almost exclusively and do it wherever I can find clients. I think I like living here because there is nothing to excite me beyond my work, except theater.

M: Tell what you are involved in at that moment in theater locally.

S: At the moment I am doing the set for "Shadow Box" which opens next week, I believe, at T.N.T. (Trumbull New Theater). I backed into that. I found early on in my involvement in community theater that I got so involved in it that everything else was going by the board. When I first came into T.N.T., I did all of their sets for every show for five years straight and suddenly realized that I wasn't getting on with my profession because of theater.

M: What year was that when you got involved there?

S: It was about two years after it was formed.

M: Like 1948?

S: Yes, somewhere around there. This would have been 1949 or 1950 when I first got into it. In my search to find some sort of connection with the community I stumbled on a silly garden-party-theatrical-do that Mrs. Pendleton was having in her back yard in Leavittsburg. They allowed me to park cars. This was my introduction to theater.

M: You parked cars?

S: Yes, I parked cars.

M: You offered your services. I'm sure they didn't pressure you.

S: No. They said, "You may come and join our group. We meet at this house out in the country." I came. My first assignment was to park cars for this summer festival of some sort. Then I got very interested in it. I had done some theater in high school. I had the lead in the senior class play, that sort of stuff. I had done a little bit of theater in college. I had always loved it but hadn't done much with it for a long time. I got involved in this community group in Warren and started doing. . . I remember we did a play called "Golden in the Hills," the ever popular melodrama.

Another strange thing that we did at the Presbyterian church called. . . I don't know what it was called. It was our great break at the Presbyterian Church. Oh, yes, it was called "Hawk Island." One of the opening scenes called for a cocktail party. The church authorities thought that we should serve tomato juice instead of anything that looked like booze; so we left.

I think the first big show we did after that in a school auditorium was called "Cradle Song." This was my initial magnum opus for the theater. For five years after that I did all of the sets for T.N.T. I then suddenly realized that I had a problem with theater. It was interfering with everything. So, I resolved to enter and get involved in only one show a year. I have done that pretty much ever since.

M: You have held to that?

S: Yes, I have held to that.

M: You are breaking it right now, aren't you?

S: Let me tell you how I backed into that one. Most of my theater experiences I have backed in to. I had committed to do the set and possibly a part in "Death of a Salesman." It was on the anniversary year. We were going to revive great things that we had done.

M: This was twenty-five years of the theater being at that site, is that correct?

S: Yes, right, exactly. We built the building; we had been in it for twenty-five years; so we were having our grand anniversary year. I committed for that. That was going to be by one play. When I mean committing to one play, I mean I don't even see the other shows. I don't go near the theater. It is that bad. If I go nearer, then I got involved.

M: You get hooked.

S: Yes, I get hooked. I was going to do Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman." We had an early casting on that. I knew I had the set. If I am in a show, I do the set. I thought this would be a sneaky way to get work out of the way. So, I am doing a set that will be used in both shows. Both shows call for three major acting areas.

M: That is the show that is going to open within a fortnight called the "Shadow Box."

S: Yes, right, exactly. So I had done the set for that. I solved my set building problems ahead of time.

M: I saw the set today. It certainly will work beautifully.

S: Yes, it will work beautifully for both shows; it will be great. For "Shadow Box" we are doing a relatively simple three level playing area. We are doing it in beige and pink. When we shift into "Death of a Salesman," we will move into the greys. The house will be remodeled to take on sort of a gothic appearance.

M: For a salesman.

S: Yes.

M: It occurred to me that the pink and up colors are being used in a production dealing with a group of people all condemned to be dying of terminal cancer, right?

S: Yes.

M: So, you can see that the "Shadow Box" is not a conventional show. None of the people are sitting around enshrouded in their misery. That should show you by the fact that they wanted an up background for the show. I find that very interesting.

S: Yes, and we are doing some marvelous music with it, very light. The play does that. The play indicates nothing somber. There are no greys in this show. It is all sort of up, the whole approach to it. It is a marvelous comedy, the "Shadow Box."

M: Both shows involve with death.

S: Right.

M: You can't escape it.

S: Yes, anyway that is the current activity. I see a lot of theater outside of T.N.T. I went to New York to see "Evita," and I was there a month ago to see "Amadeus." I see a lot of summer theater around the country, like in Williamson. I maintain a contact with theater, the goals of theater outside of T.N.T. T.N.T represents. . . Well, it is not a challenge. It is a place to display what I have learned, I guess. It is a workshop. So, I dash off and see things.

M: Mrs. Pendleton said something that I think you have probably heard her say. She said, "At T.N.T. we give you a chance to fail." That is so true. There you can experiment. You can fail and not be doomed forever.

S: We have had some classic turkeys out there and some moments that were just spiritual delight, I guess. The think that I love about community theater and especially the thing that I love about community theater here, is that it draws everybody in. We have people who are superb musicians and superb craftsmen in building trades, electrical engineers, absolutely every walk of life in the community. Somehow everybody has a chance to shine a little bit. We have a hoard of teenagers who have nothing else to do but run over to McDonald's and come over to the theater to work. The marvelous thing about it is the end product. It is something that everybody works on. Everybody can see a worth in it. I don't know of anything else in the arts that adds that to a community the way theater does.

M: Very aptly stated.

S: I'm connected with Warren Chamber Orchestra and have been very interested in that for a number of years. I am currently remodeling the rear wing of Trumbull Art Guild, so I am involved in that group. I have been interested in a local ballet group, trying to get them something to dance on, a hard surface. We have lots of art groups in the community. The thing that makes art groups so essential, particularly to a community where there is nothing else, is that it gives everybody who gets involved, a chance to give something and they can come away with something that is a little better because they have added to it. It doesn't matter what talent you have. You can be the most talented guy in the world and come in and work on a production at T.N.T.

M: And still have that priceless. . .

S: And still come out with revelations. There are things that happen. It is the combined excellence of everybody, and together it makes something that is beyond the individual.

M: T.N.T. area has a spot in my heart. I was a young divorced mother with four children. I brought somebody else's child up to read for a part for Paul Kimpel who used to be with your theater. He said, "Will the lady in the pink rollers read for a minute?" I was so embarrassed. I had just driven that child up and was hiding back in the shadows. He embarrassed me. He said, "I like your voice. I'm serious. Would you come up here a minute?" I got on the stage with my rollers which shows something in my character that I was even able to do that. He cast me in the show. I found out that I always loved theater. I thought I wasn't allowed because I was a divorcee with four children. Within a few months my whole life literally changed and that of my children. I had a place where I could go where I belonged. I had new friends. It didn't matter what you had done in the past; it only mattered what you were doing right then. My whole life changed.

S: It does with everyone. Everyone I know gets involved in theater. The thing that makes T.N.T. unique and which promotes the sort of thing that you are talking about is that we are totally unprofessional. Nobody is paid for anything. If you can't donate it or steal it, you don't buy it and you don't pay for a bloody thing out there. All services. . . We find the directors in the group. We

find our set people, our lighting people. I bleed for the time when someone who comes out to that theater will know something about lighting. Nobody does. We play with it. Fifteen years ago we did a production of "Death of a Salesman." I had been going to Williamstown to see some theater up there.

M: Massachusetts?

S: Yes. I would come back all excited, mind blowing, hated everything I had done in theater. The excellence of it just was an invigorating thing, but it was a discouraging thing too. When we did a production of "Death of a Salesman," we got into philosophies of theater, philosophies of presentation. I remember one of the things we attempted (and which we are going to do again this time) extending the knowledge of the fifteen year ago experience. . . I remember thinking that the most important thing in Willy's life, the most real things in his life, were his memories. So we lighted those scenes in a pale pink, amber sort of light, and the rest of the play took place in dull greys and blues representing the unreality of reality.

M: Because we in the theater assume that everybody knows what we are talking, but people will probably not know Willy Loman from a hill of beans someday, although it is hard for us not to imagine that. Would you give us a run-down on the play "Death of a Salesman"?

S: I doubt that people of any age who know anything about theater at all will not know about Willy Loman.

M: They might not be theater people is what I am saying. Run it down a little bit for us.

S: It is a great play. It is probably one of the great classic plays of modern times dealing with the frailty of every man, of the common man. Willy has dreams that he can't live up to--the dreams that all of us have--except that his encompass life. When I speak of dreams, I mean the dreams of people who live in a small community like this; people go out and find dreams. You certainly don't find them here unless you can create them. This is what theater is all about. You create them for a moment out on Youngstown Road at T.N.T. These are our fantasies. We create them. They make life interesting. We create a Willy Loman out there. There are little bits of Willy in all of us.

M: How do you feel about playing Willy Loman?

S: Terrified. I think so many of us are cursed with aging bodies and sixteen year old minds all of our lives. Our minds never age. I have had other experiences with "Death of a Salesman" at other levels, at other productions and aspects of the play. It is a little frightening to realize that I am playing a sixty year old man. By the way, I am just sixty this year.

I've done a lot of major roles and a lot of minor roles, but I just do one a year. I did "Runner Stumbles," you know, Father Revard.

M: Oh, yes, talk about that now on the tape?

S: Talk about maturing moments, maturing experiences. Katina Pendleton, who had done it at the Manhattan Theater in New York, came in to do Sister Rita to my Father Revard. As did the author and the producers, who stayed with me.

M: Explain about that play because each of the plays, as I say, some people may not know about.

S: "Runner Stumbles" was a fascinating true story that happened in Michigan just after 1915, somewhere around there, where a nun was murdered. The priest of the local convent or whatever was suspected of murdering her. There was a public trial that took place in Michigan. "Runner Stumbles" was the play written about this incident. It leaves the solution and the mystery of it to the audience for awhile. Then there is a confessional scene at the end where the housekeeper imagines the act, and maybe, has done it. It was a fascinating play. The interesting thing about it was that that was the first time that I had ever worked with a professional actress. That was a huge challenge.

M: Katina Pendleton, for the sake of the record here, is known professionally as Katina Cummings; she is the wife of Austin Pendleton, who is the son of Mrs. Thorne Pendleton, who is instrumental in the founding of T.N.T. That is what is wonderful about this theater. All of these people are connected and are all a very family type group of people. I think it adds a lot to what they have to offer. Frances Pendleton did come into this area. Was she living in New York at the time?

S: No, I think she was in Cleveland at the time at the Cleveland Playhouse when she got married.

- M: I don't know her background.
- S: She was from Michigan originally. She was at the Cleveland Playhouse, working there. Thorne was commuting a lot to Cleveland. I think that is where they met and were married then in Warren. Frances has been our guiding light. Frances is the one who through the years I think has been responsible for our success for at least if she doesn't present us with excellence she presents us with the opportunity to see excellence. She was the one to promote the Williamstown trips and New York to see theater. She has been very involved.
- M: Mrs. Pendleton said her advice to a new actor was that one should kill to get to Williamstown or a place like that to learn.
- S: Exactly, yes. Probably the best theater in the country, the calibre is unsurpassed.
- M: Where is it situated? In Massachusetts?
- S: Williams College is in Williamstown, Massachusetts. It is just over the mountains, the Taconic Trail from Troy in New York. It is the summer home of the Yale drama school group. They just do astonishing theater a week or a two at a time, just some of the best stuff you will ever see in your life. It is run and has been for a long time by Nicos Psacharopolis. There has been this procession of everybody you seem to find in theater and they talk about their theater experience they have trained at Williamstown. It is a glorious and beautiful place.
- M: I am going to try to petition to be an apprentice there. That is my new dream to do that.
- S: You interviewed Dick Boyd.
- M: Yes.
- S: He was an apprentice there.
- M: He told me that it was going to be hard to do it. I'm going to see what I can do.
- S: I think they are in the process of doing another new theater up there too.
- M: I figure they need character people everywhere.

S: Yes, yes. It is a terribly exciting theater. It is a very good theater.

M: Have you ever worked there, Tom?

S: No, no. I have gone there a lot just to see shows. I have fed lines to some of them sometimes and watched set work and marveled at the lighting. One of the last times I was up there I watched Peter Hunt do some marvelous electronic things with his lighting boards. I think probably if I were to pick one influence on whatever little bit of professionalism I have ever had in theater, it would be Williamstown. I remember one time going up there to see the production of "View from the Bridge." That production still haunts me. We came home and the next year we did a production of "View from the Bridge." It was an excellent production, but it was excellent because I had seen what people had done at Williamstown.

M: It stayed in your mind and you were able to. . .

S: Yes.

M: Why do you suppose the standard there is so magical? I have to assume this is magical when yourself, Mrs. Pendleton, her son, and Dick Boyd have ecstasied over this.

S: There was an interview with Christopher Reeves who had spent a couple of summers up there. It was a marvelous interview where he talked about the influence of that place. He spoke of the isolation of it. It is a very isolated community. He spoke about it being such a small community, (I suppose he means as opposed to New York) where he was able to walk off into the woods or go down and get a hamburger or a skinny dip in a pool or whatever and nobody was running up to him and saying, "Aha! You are Christopher Reeves!"

M: Who incidentally has risen to national prominence playing Superman in the movies besides which he is a fine actor. He has done some wonderful stage work. I would imagine that eight out of ten people that you would ask would know that name from him doing Superman unfortunately.

S: I went to an afternoon show at the Clark Museum there. Celeste Holme was doing a show. I remember at intermission heading for the men's room, which was a one

man men's room. The fellow in front of me was banging on the door. He turned around, and it was Christopher Reeves. He was banging on the door to get in. I said, "Why don't you just knock the door in?" Enough about Williamstown.

M: All of a sudden without any logical jump we are just going to go back to Tom Schroth's childhood because we want to get it in there; where his parents came from, the people who produced Tom Schroth, and where he grew up, and how he grew up and what he remembers about it.

S: As I say I was born in Niles. I am seventh or eighth generation here in Niles. My mother's family has been here forever. My mother was Welsh, by the way. My father's people were German. He came here as a glass blower. General Electric has a plant. Before the machines he came here to blow glass.

M: He came from where?

S: Fostoria, Ohio through Pittsburgh. He was born in Pittsburgh.

M: What were their names?

S: My mother's name was Elizabeth Evans, and my father's name was James Schroth--James Garfield Schroth, by the way.

One of the great influences on early life was my grandfather, whom I worshiped, who always lived with us. His name was Evan Thomas Evans.

M: Where was this you were growing up?

S: Right here in this house.

M: In this house?

S: Yes, yes.

M: Oh, Tom, that is marvelous. I am the child who was disowned. One of the reasons is for going to that thing called the theater. They think you are a lunatic. They thought I was crazy because I went to the theater. They wanted to know what I was doing hanging around a place like that. What do you say to people when they do that? You can't explain it, so you just feel badly.

S: Yes, you feel bad that they haven't experienced the exultation of theater. I wonder about theater, why it is so important in the community and why I keep going back to it once a year. I think basically what must affect everyone is that there is a mild sense of accomplishment about theater.

M: You get to see the results too.

S: The most important thing of it is like anything that is good and has lasted--art forms, period of art, history--there is a period of growth, and there is a period of what they describe as the classical period. Then there is a baroque period where things die and fade and styles change, and you go off into something else. The lovely thing about theater, the miracle about theater, is that it is killed in its prime. You build the thing; you develop the show; it is working, and every night it gets a little better. Then, it is time to kill it. You strike the set and never see it again.

M: That is a wonderful thought.

S: I have always thought that, it is the thing that makes it great. The theater dies in its youth, and you remember just the great things about it. You never remember its old age and its hobbling and its inability to make evenings. It becomes legendary and better than it ever was.

M: That is a wonderful thought, Tom. I really think you should expound upon that more in some other medium.

S: It is exactly what happens. It is the twenty-fifth year at T.N.T. We sit around and reminisce about theater and about the great moments--the staggering production of "Death of a Salesman" and the blockbuster production of the Arthur Milles things like "View from the Bridge."

M: It is kind of like virgins thrown into the volcano.

S: Yes, the plays were great. I'm sure they were, but I think they are greater in memory than they actually were. But that is the way they ought to be, "Now, the Legend Begins."

M: I can't tell you how impressed I am with that whole new concept of a way of describing that. Yes, they didn't rot.

S: Right.

M: They are there.

S: Just polishing off what we were talking about. That idea occurred to me. If you had been in theater for a while particularly at the community level, you see bad things and you see good things. There seems to be a preponderance of good things at least with the people who are connected, wondering what made the memory good and why the memories are good. I subscribe to that thinking about theater. People see their efforts at the time you do them as being worthwhile, and actually because they are gone you can't reconstruct them; you don't bring them back again because the play is gone. Another one is mounted.

M: Which, of course, makes the initial difference between film and theater, doesn't it?

S: Right.

M: The reduplication of an event.

S: We did a production of "Rain" last year. As a surprise one night some people moved in with a bunch of cables all over the theater. I said, "What the hell is going on?" They said, "We are not allowed to talk about this." A friend of someone in the cast, Sue Baughee's sister (Sue was playing Sadie Thompson in "Rain."), had moved in a crew to video tape the show.

M: It changed, didn't it, when that came?

S: The thing I'm thinking about is that I didn't want to see that. I didn't want to see that tape because the memories of that show are magnificent. I don't want proof that it wasn't as good as I thought it was.

M: The other evening they had on network television, on one of the major channels, a film of two years ago, the big hit "Elephant Man." I saw "Elephant Man" in its initial production at St. Peter's Church in New York City. The seating area was maybe about four more feet space than this living room when I saw it being done. I said to my son, "This play is going to go to Broadway, and it is going to get Tonys. It is going to be just wonderful." It had been done in England, of course, but it was done in the most crude circumstances in St. Peter's Church. Then I saw it when it moved to Broadway. I talked with

Phillip Anglon. Time went on, and Mel Brooks did a rip off movie on it, but it had some merit. The point being that when it was on television last week--the filmed production of the play--I just was left cold. I didn't have any of the same kind of feeling at all about it.

S: There is a magic. The temporal quality of theater I think is the thing that gives it life and gives it the afterlife. You mustn't destroy that. I think the memory is good. Maybe the memory is better.

M: I'm fascinated by the film. Do you see much film?

S: No, I don't see much at all. I don't see much television either.

M: It is a whole different experience for me. I can't compare them in anyway at all.

S: I have had nothing to do with film. I've never been into film. I don't know, I don't understand how you can segment a happening, break it up, out of sequence. I think the artist is the person in the cutting room.

M: Putting it together.

S: It can be good or bad at that point.

M: It is a giant jigsaw.

S: There is a flow in theater, and you have magic some nights or you have magic not at all.

M: You can feel it as a performer, director. You certainly feel it, don't you?

S: Right. That is the magic of it, and you go beyond what it is.

M: Sometimes when you are on stage, you can feel the audience. You think you can go all the way with these people.

S: Right. It is marvelous in timing in theater when you have an audience riding with you. It is marvelous to see how long it can take them. There is a stretch of silence, and you watch what happens. Sometimes the silences are better than the words.

M: I remember a play "Man in the Moon Marigolds" that I

did. Before the intermission several old ladies, on the ill-advice I'm sure of somebody, had come with walkers, and just as quickly got up and left because one of the characters in the play uses a walker. While I was performing as the semimonstrous mother, who I have always felt very sorry for, I noticed out of my real person and not her character that there were these crippled laddies leaving the theater. I thought that either I was so good that they couldn't stand it or I was so bad that they were going to kill me in the parking lot because you immediately notice things like that.

S: I think the magic--when you consider what theater does--is that you have a bunch of people on stage with diverse experiences and diverse emotional responses. In addition to that you have a whole audience out there with totally different experiences and totally different responses. When it clicks, it is a DNA combination of things meshing and working. If it works, it is magic. It is a miracle when it works because everything is going.

M: Of course, that feeling with the audience is so different from when there is none out there.

S: Yes.

M: Is there anything else from your childhood, things you remember? What made you want to be an architect?

S: How did I become an architect? I don't know. I remember from a very early age being in love with drawing houses. I have a very strange architectural practice. I just do residences, that's all.

M: And that is not common?

S: That is very uncommon. It is usually the work that most architects don't want. They would rather do churches and schools and those sorts of things.

M: Did you always know that was all you wanted to do?

S: Yes.

M: How did your parents feel about that?

S: They were delighted. There was always great support in drawing and in the arts.

M: Sometimes I think Mrs. Pendleton has Eleanor of Aquitaine qualities.

S: Strange you should mention that. Frances and I talk periodically about what our grand episode in the theater is going to be. We have agreed that one of these days she is going to do Eleanor to my Henry, and we are going to do "Lion in Winter."

M: They read for it at Youngstown Playhouse last year. I ran down and changed my whole winter's plan to go down, but it was already precast. I always choose to believe that things aren't done that way. I ran down and changed my itinerary of life to do it. A man came in like they say out of the parking lot with cloaks swirling. That was how good he was. You could actually feel his masculinity clanking. What a Henry he would have made, but it was already planned to be given to other people. That is too bad.

S: People object to--at least in the community level--this whole concept of precasting. I don't know how in the hell you do a play other than. . .

M: It has to be done to some level, but this was done through a political thing so badly that the whole play fell apart. You have to do it for insurance for one thing, but then you must allow a little opening that maybe a local calling will do something around the corner.

S: At the tryouts for "Death of a Salesman" Frances did a strange thing. She put an ad in the local paper for three days announcing a tryout. She had over fifty people showing up to read for that. She could have cast that play five times with the people there. Each one would have been different.

M: I'm thinking that even though in "Lion in Winter" Henry is about fifty and Eleanor is in her sixties. She was eleven years older than him.

S: Right.

M: Now you and Frances have to hang on because I keep delving into their lives. We could have it that Henry who is burdened with his troubles and sons and everything ages. Eleanor who is still riding off. . . I loved it because she rode off to Brittany to drag brides back to make sure they got there. She brought Richard

the Lion Heart's bride to him.

S: Berengaria.

M: Yes, Berengaria. She went and got her. Henry could come in sort of as a ghost figure since he died I think when he was fifty-four. He did utter, "My sons have broken my heart." Eleanor went on, but he could kind of come in as a ghost mentor. Would you like that concept?

S: Mr. Goldman would like to rewrite the play for you, I'm sure.

M: We'll just ask him if we can add on.

S: She finished her years at the abbey at Fontevrault.

M: Yes.

S: I've done my pilgrimage there. Well, what haven't we talked about?

M: Your early life.

S: It was a fairly ordinary life. I went to the public schools in Niles. It was nothing extraordinary. I did lots of art work. In summer, I would go to art classes. I would run away and paint the local bridges in oil.

M: Your parents sent you?

S: Yes. They were always very supportive.

M: Did you have brothers and sisters?

S: I had a brother, yes. There was no particular relationship to him, and we are totally estranged now.

M: I was told to ask you, by your dear friend Dick Boyd, about your involvement with Warren Chamber Orchestra.

S: Yes, I have always had an engrossing interest in classical music. I played a violin at the age of seven, for about three years. I took piano lessons.

M: Here in Niles?

S: Yes, always local. I played a French horn in high school, a trumpet and that sort of thing. I jumped around with the instruments. Anyway, I have always had an interest in music.

M: Aren't you very instrumental in backing the group here?

S: Yes, yes. I did a lot of early work with them when they were first organized. In fact I used to do all of their programs. I thought they needed a better image. I used the silk screen every program. It was marvelous.

One of the things we are fighting now about the Chamber is--and this is a thing I feel about theater when we talk about correlation of arts--they have lots of similar problems. I think battling the tendency to grow is a thing that any art group has to fight. At one of the last concerts they did a Beethoven symphony way beyond what they should have been doing. There was an elaborate orchestra hiring extra people. They did a grand job of it, but I'm having some difficulty with them now trying to talk about staying small. It is the same thing with theater.

M: That would be in line with Mrs. Pendleton's thinking on T.N.T.

S: Exactly, yes, you have to stay small.

M: Whether or not to grow big. Like the Youngstown Playhouse you have to. . . . I do think you sacrifice quality.

S: Right. You have eleven paid employees down there.

M: Yes.

S: We don't have any. A necessity, I think, if you are going to retain the flavor of experimental theater. Educational theater can do it beautifully because they are totally supported by the institution. Community theater can be just as exciting as long as it stays small and works within its capabilities and doesn't have to produce nine musicals a year for box office to support the paid help. One of the things that T.N.T. has done is to stay small with no salaries. No one gets paid a penny.

M: Everything is contributed and voluntary.

S: Everything is contributed, right.

M: Doesn't it make that rather unique across the nation too?

S: I think it is, yes. It keeps it small because we are working at an amateur level all the time. You don't have the tendency to expand into grand concepts, you keep it at something you can afford to run. It is the same way with the Chamber. The part I'm getting at is to improve the quality of the work, but keep within the limits.

M: You don't need to have many members.

S: You don't need forty-three people up on a stage. If you want to hear that kind of an orchestra, go to Cleveland. That is the best there is of a grand orchestra.

M: Your fields of expertise cover architecture, acting. Have you directed?

S: Yes, once. I am not a director. I don't have that organized approach to theater. I tried directing. We were doing a series of plays one time, and I wanted to do a Greek play. I had been in Greece that summer. We did "Thezmophoriazusi" I remember. It was a disaster. I never tried directing after that. I'm not a director.

M: Why do you feel it turned out badly? You realize that is unusual for someone to even say that something he did turned out badly. A lot of people don't say that ever.

S: I don't understand. I don't have the grand concept, I guess, for directing. That is what it takes.

M: For good directing.

S: Good directing. I probably don't handle people that well which is what it is forty percent all about, I believe.

M: Do you mean the herding them about, the moving them about, and bossing them?

S: Dealing with them. . . I think I tend to deal with people as personalities and not as things that you move about on a stage.

M: That can become cumbersome because then you are constantly thinking of their personal reactions.

S: Right, right. You lose the grand concept.

M: I know a director who works around this area who makes

blocks of wood for each production and names them like Tom, Carol, Laura, so forth and sits in his office and moves the blocks of wood. They are literally blocks of wood.

S: I think that is probably a portion of what every successful director does.

M: He is good at that. He is noted for his blocking with those blocks of wood. As a matter of fact he doesn't have a rapport with the people.

S: You are presenting something visual. I can do it with architecture because I am dealing with materials and impersonal things, but I don't think I can do it with people. I don't have that ability to deal with people impersonally.

M: I can't relate to people that way, but I know that he does that successfully. I envy that ability, I guess, in a way. However, he doesn't relate to people at all on a personal level in any way.

S: I don't know. I think that is the style.

M: I think a happy medium might be, in that case, more needed, where you can be objective enough about them to utilize that part of their personality that you find.

S: If it works in what you are doing.

M: Is there anything else that is a favorite spot of yours that you would like for us to know?

S: I don't know.

M: You were at the T.N.T. Theater the other day.

S: Saturday we have set sessions.

M: You were there yesterday with cement of some kind on your fingers, is that what it was?

S: I was dutchmaning some of the flats.

M: That was Saturday when you were working at the theater.

S: Until 5:00.

M: Well, if you don't have anything else you want to say,

you plan on ending your life then where you began it then, in Niles.

S: Yes. I can't think of anything else. I will hopefully not leave this house. I am perfectly happy here.

M: I really want to thank you. I really appreciate you taking the time.

S: I enjoyed it.

M: Thank you, Tom Schroth.

END OF INTERVIEW